



Vital info you need with no strings attached

Parishes encouraged to help members with estate planning

“Our financial lives are part of our total lives. Our finances are not in a box separate and apart from the rest. If we are faithful people then we will live our financial lives faithfully, too.”

John E. Forsyth, chairman

Diocesan Estate Planning Awareness Council

Attorney at Law, Forsyth, Cubbage & Associates, P.C.



By BOB GISLER

“I know estate planning is important – but I just don’t want to go and hear another sales pitch.”

That is all too often the sentiment when it comes to gathering estate planning information.

Bishop Slattery has charged the Office of Estate Planning Awareness for the Diocese with helping parishioners and clergy understand the benefits of effectively planning one’s estate in a non-threatening environment.

The Bishop, this office and its council consider the effort a ministry and are dedicated to presenting consistent, current and relevant educational information in – again, I emphasize – a non-threatening environment. We do that by working with parishes to create their own estate planning councils whose members then plan how to effectively relate to the people in their parish the often confusing and overwhelming information regarding planning one’s estate.

Here are some frightening statistics:

- Fifty to 70 percent of Americans die without a will.

- Among those who do have a will, the vast majority are in critical need of updating;

- Seventy-five percent of young married couples with children have no will or document in place to provide for the care of their children.

Without adequate planning, your favorite uncle – Uncle Sam – will be the biggest beneficiary of all you have so diligently worked for: to provide for yourself and leave a legacy to your loved ones.

For those who die without a will, the state of Oklahoma distributes their property according to its own schedule and laws. In other words, the state already has written a will for those who die without one.

All states have laws that provide for the distribution of the property of those who have died intestate (without a will), but these laws have very general terms and cannot possibly fit the needs of every family situation or the desires of the decedent.

People who do not write a will fail to take advantage of estate tax savings, savings that actually are encouraged by our tax laws. They run the risk of forcing their loved ones to face unnecessary administrative fees and probate costs.

This can cause heirs worry, delays and even financial hardships; and nothing will be given to religious or charitable causes which otherwise would have been considered and decided upon.

Tragically, families are sometimes bitterly divided because a decedent failed to write a will. Simply stated, procrastination in planning one’s estate until it is too late has placed many grave burdens on the shoulders of loved ones who are forced to pick up the pieces of a confused financial puzzle.

Catholics in the Diocese of Tulsa can learn how to avoid all these difficulties – and avail themselves of the benefits of estate planning – by participating in our program.

A parish need not have estate planning professionals within their own ranks to form an estate planning committee. Nor is it necessary to create its own program or seminar series.

The Diocese’s council is made up of highly skilled estate planning professionals, many of whom function as our workshop presenters. We have developed a process that includes a step-by-step manual and a method for ongoing assistance that enables a parish to implement and work the program efficiently.

The professionals on the diocesan council consider their participation in this effort as part of their stewardship - freely giving back of their time and talent - and do so with no expectation of return. Should a parish have such professionals among their numbers, those identified could, after meeting certain criteria, become presenters.

More than six years have gone into developing this effort; we have moved slowly on purpose, and the effort is proving worthwhile.

Thus far more than 700 members of parishes in the Diocese of Tulsa have gained valuable and timely information based on Scripture and Catholic spirituality - without cost or obligation - and with the assurance that no follow up will take place unless they initiate it.

Seminars such as: Basic Estate Planning, Ways to Financial Freedom, Advance Directives (Living Wills) and Long Term Care Insurance are proving extremely helpful.

Many factors are involved that bring about success, but when the process is followed, it works. At one parish, seven to 10 attendees were expected for the first seminar/workshop, but 70 showed up. Another parish expected 20 to 30 people and hosted almost 100.

This effort succeeds because it is addressing the fundamental issues people need to understand:

- The ever-increasingly complex but vitally important issue of estate planning;

- The historic and catastrophic results of inadequate planning;

- Church teaching regarding these issues.

Basically, you have a choice of three entities to which you can disperse your legacy: your family/loved ones, the government and charity. Through effective planning, you have the ability to determine which two of the three receive the majority of your life’s work.

Through thoughtful preparation, it is possible to provide adequately for loved ones and create opportunities to provide for charity by minimizing the sometimes massive erosion of assets brought about by not planning one’s affairs.

In “Death and the Life After,” Billy Graham wrote: “A will can be a testimony to those who read it. It can be a lasting memorial to faith in Christ and love for others. Someone said that he could tell better what a man had in his heart by reading his will than by reading his obituary.”

For information regarding planning your estate or getting estate planning seminars started in your parish, contact the Office of Estate Planning Awareness at 918-294-1904, email estateplanning@dioceseoftulsa.org or visit www.dioceseoftulsa.gift-planning.org/

Bob Gisler is director of the Office of Stewardship, Development and Estate Planning.

“The efficacy, content and presentation of the estate planning information made available by the Diocese is extremely well done and beneficial to all. It provides a simple, well thought out program that any parish, no matter its size, can follow easily. Being able to gather such vital information in a no-strings-attached atmosphere is refreshing.”

Msgr. Dennis C. Dorney, pastor, Church of St. Mary



Celso Alonso, chairman of the Stewardship Team of Christ the King Church, presents “Ways to Financial Freedom” at a Feb. 28 workshop at the Church of St. Mary.

Bishop Slattery encourages participation

Whenever we pray for the dead, we are reminded of the inevitability of death, our own death as well as the deaths of loved ones. With this reminder comes a mixture of joy and sadness – the joy of knowing that our loved ones, because they were faithful to the end, have joined our Lord and Savior in heaven; we also experience sadness from the sudden and painful absence of those same loved ones.

But there is often another kind of pain in the aftermath of losing a loved one in death. When a loved one dies without having arranged for the distribution of his or her property and, in some cases, the care of one’s children, an unexpected burden is added to the grieving loved ones.

Family members must face new and often tragic financial difficulties. This painful situation might have been avoided if the decedent had written a will.

The Diocese of Tulsa has established an Office of Estate Planning Awareness and an associated council to address this issue, and both are aggressively pursuing a strategy to establish estate planning councils in all parishes to support the initiative to educate as many parishioners as possible and, hopefully, encourage people to take action by making their estate plans.

I ask you to get involved in your parish’s estate planning council’s activities, and if your parish hasn’t established one, to encourage your pastor to do so right away.

Planning makes good sense, and it is good stewardship of one’s assets. Such planning is a legacy of love – not only for your family but also for God’s family, the Church.

**Most Rev. Edward J. Slattery
Bishop of Tulsa**

How the program works

1. The pastor is introduced to, agrees with and endorses the effort because of the benefit to his parishioners and parish.

2. A Parish Estate Planning Committee is formed, guided through the use of the manual, hosts seminars and becomes the marketing arm of the parish effort with continuing assistance from the Diocese.

3. One free hour of consultation with an estate planning professional is made available for any parishioner who attends a seminar.

4. Tools have been developed to evaluate and track seminar results and assure participants that any follow-up which occurs will be initiated only by them.

“The program has created an opportunity for our parishioners to hear qualified speakers discuss weighty issues, regarding not just giving but estate planning, wills and trusts. I think people feel comfortable asking questions and discussing these issues in a spiritual context.”

Brady Pringle, chairman

Holy Family Cathedral Estate

Planning Committee